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ABSTRACT

Even though enrollment in elementary schools and national literacy rates have increased greatly in India since its independence in 1949, the number of dropouts and illiterate individuals will also continue to increase unless the needs of the socially disadvantaged are identified and met. The majority of the dropouts and the illiterates belong to socially disadvantaged groups such as the scheduled castes and tribes, urban slum dwellers, and working class families. Almost three-quarters are females. While the rapid national birth rate accounts in part for the paradoxical literacy and illiteracy rates, responsibility must also be assigned to Indian educators who have failed to adapt to the demands of mass education. India perpetuates an educational system whose curriculum is based on a middle class bias. The lower class child is perceived by teachers to be uneducable. A study was conducted to identify factors that account for the low attainment of lower class children. Interviews were conducted with an unspecified number of children under the age of five years and their mothers from lower class groups. Results were compared with the responses of four mothers and their children drawn from the middle class. Findings indicate the following factors including: (1) discontinuity between the home and the school environments; (2) language deprivation; and (3) language use account for the situation. A list of references is included. (FMW)

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EDUCATIONAL ISSUES OF THE SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

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One finds a complete paradoxical situation in India with respect to the primary education and adult literacy programmes. That is, while there has been a tremendous increase in the enrolment at the primary level, the number of children not attending the school also increased. Similarly despite an increase in the percent of literates, the number of adult illiterates in India increased. In terms of number, India has more illiterates than any other country. Both these points need some clarification.

i) PRIMARY EDUCATION: The post independent India made significant strides in providing educational facilities to everyone including the children from the socially disadvantaged groups by opening schools throughout India including in remote villages. During the last three and half decades, the number of educational institutions in India increased from 2.3 lakhs to 6.9 lakhs of which 5.04 lakhs consisting of 73 percent of the total educational institutions are primary schools[1]. Now most children have a primary school within one kilo metre from their homes/huts, which led to an increase in enrolment at the primary schools; yet there are more children out of schools now than at any time before, owing to the occurrence of the high incidence of the phenomena of stagnation and wastage in education, i.e. of those who enter class Ist at the age of 5 + in a primary school, only just about 50 percent complete class iv (lower primary stage) and only 24 out of 100 children entering class Ist complete class VII. The drop out rate for the girls at the lower primary stage is as high as 70 percent[2]. Incidentally, a majority of the drop outs belong to the socially disadvantaged groups like: members of the scheduled castes and Tribes, urban slum dwellers and the other working class families.

ii) From 1950 onwards huge investments were made in conducting adult education and functional literacy programmes. The efforts in this area reached their zenith during the short lived regime of the Janata government at Delhi. As a percent of the total population, literacy has made steady progress, i.e., whereas in 1951 the literates accounted for just 16.67 percent of the total population, in 1981 the literates accounted for 36.23 percent. Sex is a major variable in the literacy rate, i.e. while the figures for the males in urban and rural areas respectively are : 65.8 and 40.8 percent, the corresponding figures for the females are: 47.8 and 18 percent[3]. Despite the phenomenal increase in the literacy rates, one finds a paradox in absulute terms, i.e. while there were about 300 million illiterates in India in 1949 (the year India got freedom), there were 437 million illiterates in 1981. According an estimate of the World Bank, assuming that the other social factors like the birth & death rate and the wastage in education remaining the same, in the year 2000, there would be 500 million illiterates in India which would then account for 55 percent of all the illiterates in the world. The literacy rates particularly of the women listed above are only the National average and does not imply an even distribution for the entire India. In terms of literacy rates, particularly of the women, the Hindi belts comprising of Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Predesh and Utter pradesh could be considered the dark spots of India. As against the National average of 24.8 percent of female literacy, Rajasthan has the lowest rate of 5.46 percent. The other three Hindi States show a variation between 8.99 and 10.17 percent[4]. And no country can prosper without the emanicipation of its womenfolk for which the education is the most important input.

These dismal figures, however, should not give an impression to anyone that the Indian Educational system is a total failure, though the ' Challenge of Education ' (1985:1.25) claims that ' the present scenario is an indication of the failure of the

educational system'. Rather, in reality, as in the past, the Indian Universities and the other professional institutes continue to roll out top scorers in different subjects including science and technology. The report of a study[5] on the entrants to the different Indian Institutes of Technology (I.I.T.s) show that 6 percent of the children from the urban elite families corner 96 percent of the total seats in all the I.I.T.s together. This probably indicates that the occurrence of the high incidence of the phenomena of stagnation and wastage in education is the direct result of throwing open of the seats of learning to those who were traditionally outside the school system. If so, it poses two questions, viz., (i) was it right or proper to have opened the flood gates of learning to the children from the socially disadvantaged groups ? and (ii) are the children from the socially disadvantaged groups uneducable ? While the answer is in the affirmative to the first question, it is in the negative for the second. Both these answers need some elucidation.

a) The Article 45 of the Directive Principles of the Constitution India lays down that the State,within a period of ten years from the date of adoption of the Constitution, shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14 years. And Article 46 of the Directive principles inter alia states that the State will promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker sections of the people and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes[6].

According to the 1971 census, 42 percent of the total Indian population consists of children under the age of 14 years. Education of the entire lot of these children numbering 248 million is, therefore, a scared responsibility entrusted to the Indian educationists by the Constitution of India. Thus, the efforts to universalize the education for the children upto the age of 14 years is a constitutional requirement and is in the right direction. The Indian educationists, however, have so far failed to discharge this constitutional responsibility owing to

their disinclination to make any attempt in changing the present class based education to a mass one, though the Kothari Commission (1964-66)[7] had strongly recommended such a course. The stereotyped attitudes of the teachers towards the capabilities of the socially disadvantaged children are also responsible for the stagnation and wastage in education. The failure of the children belonging to the socially disadvantaged groups in not benefiting from formal education could therefore, be attributed to the failure of the Indian educationists to adjust to the widespread cataclysmic social change.

b) Every child irrespective of its heredity or social background is educable though some psychologists like Jensen (1969,1976) etc., questioned this claim. The seeds for the very concept that some children are not educable were sown in 1837 by Issac Taylor through his proposal for 'Home Education'. Taylor made a sharp distinction between children from the upper classes who had intellectual minds suitable for classical education and the children from the working class who owing to their mental deficiency arising out of poor heredity are incapable of undergoing classical education. He was also for keeping the girls out of the school system. Taylor's views were followed up in 1870 by a Social Darwinist like Galton who advocated an uncompramisingly hereditarian intelligence theory. Galton saw intelligence as an innate, immutable and measurable attribute determining the entire range of the individuals' potential for intellectual and cognitive development. The Victorians, Galton's contemporaries, however, rejected his views as they firmly believed in the educablity of every child and they placed the burden of success of every child on the teachers. The Victorians put the seal of their faith in the fundamental equality and educability of all children through the revised code of 1882 and its inauguration of the system of payment by result[8]. This firm view of the Victorians regarding the educability of every child did not last long. Owing to the changed

socio-economic situation in England, the psychometric intelligence theory which was rejected by his contemporaries was accepted nearly half a century after it was formulated. By 1920, the psychometric intelligence theory achieved a tight grip over the educational theory and practice in England. But by 1940, this theory started losing its grip over England, again owing to a change in economic position, i.e., there was a steady economic growth in England which required the systematic development of the entire human ability and therefore, the need to educate every child, irrespective of its social background, was felt.

There was a parallel in the U.S.A. also. In 1965, President Johnson's announcement of war on poverty having the principal aim of integrating the Black Americans with the rest of the American Society partly: (i) to contain the growing sense of alienation by the Black Americans and (ii) to meet the urgently needed skilled labour for the Vietnam War, let to the commencement of compensatory education programmes under the cover term of 'HEADSTART'. Though there was no proper assessment of the impact of the Headstart programme, by 1970 there was a general feeling that the programme had failed. The Linguistic Variability Hypothesis propounded by Ditmar and supported by Labov, Baratz etc., also let to the discrediting of the Headstart programme, as the programme heavily depended upon the Classical Verbal Deficit Theory. (It is not proposed to discuss the merits and demerits of various theories on differential educational attainments.). Coupled with this, the worldwide slump in 1973 and the defeat in Vietnam War seemed to have induced in the U.S.A., a widespread spirit of fatalism precisely the kind of intellectual climate highly receptible to scepticism about the potential of mass education and its use to society. And it was this new climate that once again brought forth the ugly face of the outmoded and discarded intelligence theory including the racist view of Jensen.

It is quite evident from the instances cited above that the acceptance or the rejection of different theories on the educability of the children, particularly of the children from the socially disadvantaged groups like the working class in Britain or the Black American in the U.S.A. has nothing to do with the children themselves, rather these theories were the products of different socio-economic factors like: the prolonged slump, gross mismatch between the demand for and supply of seats in the schools, need for the skilled labour owing to the economic growth or war etc. It could therefore, be restated that no child is uneducable. If certain groups of children have been condemned in the past and labelled as uneducable, such a labelling arose out of certain socio-politico-economic reasons.

Returning to the Indian situation, one finds that despite the great cultural heritage of the early civilization, no study is available to account for the differential educational attainments by different segments of the Indian population. A probable reason for the absence of such a study could be that the education in India has been the privilege of certain castes right from the Vedic period dating back to 12th century B.C. The stratified caste based educational pattern continued upto the beginning of the British period. The British rule changed the caste based education to a class based one. This change in the educational policy rather than ameliorating the condition of the children from the low castes crushed them owing to their inability to meet the expenses of the education, while the Brahmins and the other caste Hindus who had held a sway over the society took the maximum advantage of the new policy. The low castes thus remained completely outside the perview of the education. Eventhough the post Independent India offered different types of incentives for education to the children belonging to the socially disadvantaged groups, they could not benefit much from the formal education as the middle

class biased curriculum was found to be too demanding to the children from the socially disadvantaged groups. Further the educationists in authority, under the pretext of catching up with the Western world, go on up grading the curriculum year after year. One wonders whether or not it is an attempt to extent the sociological phenomena of ' Sanskritization and Westernization' to education also. What is significant to note is that education till today in India is a class based one. Thus if the performance of the socially disadvantaged children at the school is deemed to be poor, it is because they and their way of life including their language variety are judged on the anvil of the middle class values and the middle class language variety.

With this background information, it is proposed to discuss in brief, the probable causes for the differential educational attainment and remedial steps from the Indian context. In this the following three sub-themes would be handled, viz., (i) continuity- discontinuity between the home and the school arising out of the early socialization pattern a child undergoes, (ii) early deprivation, (iii) the language use at the school and the teachers attitude and self fulfilling prophecy. These would be attempted primarily on the basis of the data collected by this writer for a study on ' socialization processes and differential verbal repertorire of the pre-school children'. Before proceeding further, a brief statement about the nature of the sample, tools used and the methodology adopted is made.

Nature of the sample: The entire sample from the socially disadvantaged groups were collected from two villages on the outskirts of Mysore city (Karnataka). One village consists exclusively of the members of the Scheduled Castes living in a well integrated compact area. This village has a primary school just beside the village where every child is given free mid-day meals. The other village has a very big area with scattered huts/houses. It has

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people from different castes including the Scheduled Castes. The school meant to cater to the children of this village is about two kilo metres from the village. This school does not offer mid-day meals. A common feature found with both the villages is that the adult male members work as casual labourers while the females including small girls work as unskilled maid servants in the middle class families outside their villages. The females and most men are illiterate. Even if the girls are sent to the school, they are withdrawn much before attaining the age of puberty. The male members spent a major portion of their earnings on drinks. For the purpose of comparison, four middle class mothers and their children were also interviewed. All the middle class mothers interviewed are graduates with one having a Ph.D. degree. Two of them are employed.

Tools: The following tools were used for eliciting language samples from the children.

1) Mechanical toys: band master, disco monkey and aeroplane.
2) Coloured wooden toys: elephant, horse, tiger and dog.
3) Picture sequence for narrating a story, and;
4) Telling a known story.

The information on the mothers' control over their children, communication matrix between the mother-child and the points pertaining to the socialization pattern etc., were collected through a questionnaire.

Methodology: The speech corpus collected from each child were normally of uniform elicitation procedure. A good deal of familiarization process had taken place before the language samples were collected from each child. They were also given chocolates and biscuits. The language samples were collected only during the second or third visit. To encourage the children to respond effectively, the earlier recorded language samples were played back to them. They were further told that at the end of

the recording, their voices would also be played back to them. This approach had clicked even with the children who had shown some initial inhibition. It might be pointed out that the interviews were conducted in a most communicative atmosphere which were certainly not of the type envisaged by Labov (1973:27) wherein a small black boy was questioned by a large white middle class interviewer in an attempt to elicit in such a threatening or atleast unusal context which according to Labov resulted the child producing no more than defensive mono-syllabic behaviour. In this study, if the responses of certain class/ group of children were not upto the expectation, it simply means that the children concerned did not have the right type of experience or exposure, rather than any reflection on their cognitive abilities.

i) Continuity Discontinuity of Experience between the home and the school:

Children from different sub-classes during their early infancy undergo different types of socialization processes which in their turn offer to them different experiences, values and different types of language use. When the experience gained by a child at home tallies with the school culture and language use, the child finds a continuity between its home and school which in its turn enables it to benefit from formal education at the school. When a child's early experience differs from that of the school, the child finds a discontinuity between its home and the school which prevents the child in benefiting from formal education. Since the school culture and language use is based on the middle class culture and language us a middle class child on entering the school at the age of 5 + finds a continuity between his home and the school. Since the socialization process a child from the socially disadvantaged groups undergoes is considered inappropriate by the middle class biased school, the child from the socially disadvantaged groups on entering the school finds

a discontinuity between its home and school which in its turn places the disadvantaged child on an unequal footing with its middle class counterparts. These statements could be substantiated on the basis of the interview with the mothers and the linguistic responses of the children from both the social classes.

Mothers' Interview:

i) Socially Disadvantaged Groups:

Most of the mothers interviewed have 4-5 children. In all instances if the elder one is a girl, she attends to the bathing, toilet habits etc., of the younger siblings. Otherwise, the mother herself attends to the children till they are 2-3 years old, whereafter the children are on their own. The mothers carry the very young ones to the places of their work. When not in the school, the other children are left to play near their huts/houses in unsupervised peer groups. No toys are purchased for the children. The husbands do not help the mothers in the child care. Since the school in the neighbourhood of the exclusively S.C.village offers free mid-day meals even children aged 3-4 go to that school. Despite the long distance, some poor children from the other village also go to that school for the benefit of getting the mid-day meals. The children do not study at all in their homes/huts, nor do the parents offer any type of help in studies as they are illiterate. The parents do not meet the teachers to enquire about the studies of their children. All the mothers, however, have a positive attitude towards the education of their sons. They would like their sons to study as much as possible. But the girls are withdrawn from the schools when they are about 9 years. The only expectation about the girls is to marry them off before attaining the age of puberty. Not a single parent told any stories to the children nor do they discuss with the children on any topic of general interest. In other words, the communication matrix between the mother and the child is very low.

Beating the children is the only maternal control adopted for all types of undesirable acts. After beating the children they are not told the reason for beating; it has to be assumed.

ii) Middle Class Mothers:

The interviewing of the middle class mothers had a very limited objective of comparison on various aspects of socialization processes their children undergo with that of their working class counterparts. Therefore, only four middle class mothers were interviewed. Of these, one - a university lecturer - has a Ph.D. degree and the other three are graduates, but two of them are full time house wives.

These mothers have 1 to 3 issues. The working graduate mother shared many features of her disadvantaged counterparts. The only area she differed from the disadvantaged mothers is in sparing daily one hour for coaching her only son aged 5 +. This socialization pattern is reflected in the verbal behaviour of the boy in that it nearly tallied with that of his disadvantaged counterparts. The mothers or the maid servants attend to the toilet habits of the young ones. Since different types of toys are purchased for the children, the small children usually play in their respective homes in which the mothers also join. The mothers talk to the children from the early infancy of the children, at times adopting the monologue technique i.e., the mothers putting the questions to the children about their toys or of other articles and then answering themselves on behalf of the kids. Stories are told to the children regularly. The children from the age of 3 onwards are taken to the movies, parks etc., and on return they are asked questions about the things they had seen. From the age of three onwards, the children are in the school and the parents help the children in studies regularly. They also visit the school to enquire about the studies

of their children. Usually, the children's behaviour are modified to the desired goal through verbal appeal to them. Beating is rarely resorted to. A major area where the middle class mothers differ from that of their disadvantaged counterparts is in the sense of guilt, if their children bring to home any item not belonging to them. While asking the children to return the article, they also impart a sense of guilt through oral explanation to the children, whereas the disadvantaged mothers were mainly concerned with the sense of shame, if they or their children were caught in the act of taking other's articles.

The summary of the interview with the children would clearly show a correlation between the socialization pattern a child undergoes at home and its verbal repertoire. Only four themes are discussed below. These are: (i) body parts and their uses, (ii) naming the colours, (iii) counting and (iv) use of the appropriate personal termination with the verb. In all these themes, three out of the four middle class children interviewed responded appropriately without any difficulty. The only son of the graduate mother who had very little verbal interaction with her son responded almost like his disadvantaged counterparts. A brief account of the responses of the children are given below. The response pattern of the children from the socially disadvantaged children only are given.

i) Body Parts: Eventhough, these children had attended the nursery classes for a period ranging from 6 to 18 moths, no learning seems to have taken place in the class. Most of them did not know the use of different body parts. For instance, for most of the children, the hand is for ' eating ' or ' beating ', the ear for ' removing the mucus ', the ' eyes' for ' crying' etc. A five year old girl went to the extent of stating that she did not use her eye at all and nothing would happen to her, if she did not have the eyes. None could state even approximately the use of nose or ear.

ii) Colour: The children had difficulty in naming the colours, though some could use the folk terms like: arisna instead of halad ' yellow', sannada benna instead of bili 'white' etc. Some had difficulty in naming clear colours like black and white. Such children could, however, distinguish these colours. This was established by showing to each child a particular colour, say for instance, 'white' and asking the child to show similar colours elsewhere in the vicinity, which they did correctly. This implies that the children had no difficulty in visual discrimination, rather their failure to name different colours arose out of their non-exposure to the words referring to different colours.

iii) Numerals: Many children had difficulty in counting the numerals from one to ten, i.e. after couting 1, 2, they would jump to 7 or 6 and then to 5,3 etc. This indicates that the children knew the names for different numerals but could not count them in sequential order. None could calculate even simple additions like 2 + 2 or 3 + 3 etc.

iv) Use of the appropriate personal termination: By and large, most of the children had used the appropriate personal termination, though they ignored the singular- plural opposition. (In addition most of them uniformly used the non-standard forms which is ignored here). Some children regularly used the neuter forms with the verb when the subject is a noun referring to a human being and some others used I person form for the III person neuter subject.

It might be pointed out that the use of non-standard personal termination is viewed purely from the angle of educational success or failure and not from the angle of the autonomy of the language variety which is a sociolinguistic phenomenon. It might also be mentioned here that the Indian situation is

much more complicated than what was stated in Labov (1969) where he gave certain rules for the copula deletion and for the other non-standard features found in the Black American English. The complication arises primarily because Kannada and many other Indian languages show concord between the subject and the verb in a sentence in number gender person and human non human subjects. Sometimes, the subject shows concord in tense of the verb. There might not have been much difficulty in transferring the habit of using the non-standard form of the personal terminations to the standard ones, had there been a regular correspondance between the two in the usage of the children. The real learning problem arises when the children fail to keep the distinctions apart and use the merged form, for instance the use of the first person form for the III person neuter subject as in:

kudire	a:ṭa:ḍini	instead of:
horse	play I person P.T.	
kudire	a:ṭa:ḍtide	'horse plays'

In addition to the features mentioned, it was found that none excepting one child could tell a story told to them earlier by the class teachers. They also failed to narrate the incident dipicted by the sequence of pictures. One middle class child also could not tell any stories nor narrate the incident depicted by the sequence of pictures, whereas the other three middle class children told two or more stories known to them and also narrated the story from the picture sequence. It was learnt that those stories were told to them by their mothers and their mothers used to ask them to repeat the stories.

2) Deprivation:

There are innumerable studies, to cite a few: Bowlby (1964), Bloom (1964), Cowley & Grierel (1966), Rutter (1973), Wadge and Prosser (1973), showing the great damage caused to the growing

child by early deprivation as the development of the brain does not take place evenly. The study of Bloom is cited to illustrate this point. Bloom found a difference of 20 I.Q. point between two identical twins brought up in different environments. The differences were split up as under:

i) 10 I.Q. points difference between the period of birth and 4 years,

ii) 6 I.Q. points difference between the ages of 4 and 8, and;

iii) only 4 I.Q. points difference between the ages of 8 and 17.

This clearly shows that the environmental deprivation during the early stages would have much more damaging effect on the final adult than the taking place of the deprivation when the development of the brain itself is taking place at a slow pace. This further reveals that there are crucial learning areas in the early days of infancy which if not taken place at the appropriate time would not be compensated later on by the central nervous system.

The socially disadvantaged children under this study are deprived in every sense of the term. Owing to the extreme poverty of their parents, they are not only deprived proper food but also of everything a child in its infancy should have, viz., the close company of the parents, stimulating home environment, proper clothing, toys to play etc. Herein lies a major advantage of the urban elite children over their socially disadvantaged counterparts.

3. <u>The Language use and the Teachers' Attitude</u>:

The socially disadvantaged children use in the class room also the variety of language to which they are accustomed to at home. The teachers who have no understanding of the variations in language and language use in different contexts put the speech forms into two pigeons holes of ' right ' and ' wrong ' and the disadvantaged children always find their language use in

the pigeon hole of ' wrong '. In addition, the teachers out of their ignorance attempt to teach the standard variety as a replacement variety, forgetting the fact that any teacher who rejects the child's language also rejects the child, his peer group, relatives etc., and since a child spends more time outside school than in the school, if the child has to make a choice between the two, it would chose the former, which automatically results in wastage in education.

The teachers out of their ill-founded and pre-conceived notions about the capabilities of the disadvantaged children condemn the children as unsuitable for education owing to their so-called low I.Q. arising out of poor heredity. This opinion of the teachers, when communicated to the children acts as self fulfilling prophecy. Thus the teachers' ignorance about the language use and the stereotyped views about the socially disadvantaged children turn the linguistic difference into educational failure. In this manner, the socially disadvantaged children also become the innocent victims of the teachers' ignorance as well as prejudices.

Conclusion:

A paradox was found in the area of primary education and in the adult literacy programmes in that in the post indepedent India, while more children were enrolled in the schools and more adults underwent the literacy programmes, it is found that more children remained outside the school now than at any time before and the number of adult illiterates also increased. This paradox could be attributed partly to the unchecked birthrate. Depite that, better results could have been achieved, had the persons in authority been at bit more sincere in their profession and adopted a realistic approach. We would revert to this statement presently.

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It was noted that 70 percent of the total drop outs are from the female students and further that 77 percent of the total females in India do not attend any school at all. It is an irony of fate that the Indian women who had taken part in the socio-political affairs of India at a time when the Western countries including the Greek civilization were treating their women as cabbages, are today degraded to the principal role of child bearers. Today an Indian women is always dependent upon a male first as a daughter to a father, then as a wife to the husband and in old age as mother to a son. If India is to progress, every female child must be educated so as to offer her an opportunity to contribute to the prosperity of India.

It was also found that the socially disadvantaged children usually lagged behind their middle class counterparts at the school. Owing to this factor, many psychologists and even some educationists had/have been condemning the disadvantaged children as unsuitable for education. A review of the socio-political history of the U.K. and the U.S.A. revealed that the opinion on the educability or otherwise of the disadvantaged children rested primarily on exterior factors like: gross mismatch between the demand for and supply of the seats in schools, demand for the skilled labour etc, and had nothing to do with the capabilities of the children. The Indian situation is completely different in that the education right from the earliest known period was restricted to certain castes. When the caste based education was changed to a class based one during the British period, the upper castes who had the privilege of education till then, took the maximum benefit and crushed down the castes in the lower hierarchy. After the independence of India, incentives were offered to the disadvantaged groups to enroll in the schools. Since the Indian educational system is a class based one, in practice, it prevented the socially disadvantaged children from benefitting through formal

education. The two major areas where these children face handicaps are: language use and curriculum. In the area of curriculum, it was mentioned that the continuous upgrading of the curriculum year after year seems to be an attempt to extent the sociological phenomena of ' Sanskritization and Westernization ' to the field of education also so that the gap between the elite and the masses is maintained permanently. The economic deprivation also plays some part in the handicaps of these children but the most important factor is the type of socialization process these children undergo during their early infancy. For instance, language being a skill, it could be developed only through continuous exposure to it and constant practice. Since there is very little opportunity for these children to use language with the adults, their language skills do not develop to the extent required/expected by the school. The samples under study revealed that a graduate middle class mother had very little verbal interaction with her only son which resulted in his linguistic performance showing a near parallel with that of his disadvantaged counterparts. It shows that the most significant variable in the development of language skills is not caste/class rather the intensity of adult-child verbal interaction. It is also pertinent to note that the crucial difference between the children from the two classes is not in the quality of language but in its use. For instance, Bernstein (1964) claims ' what distinguishes a middle class child from a working class child will not merely of vocabulary but sensitivity to a way organizing and responding to experience'.

The pre-conceived notions and the stereotyped views of the teachers about the expectation of the socially disadvantaged children also cause a great damage to them. It is found that the teachers from the disadvantaged group adopt a 'holier than thou ' attitude with these children. In the Western countries,

the concept of self fulfilling prophecy is exploited to improve the performance of the children while in India the ignorance of the teachers dampens the childrens interest in their studies. In other words, the socially disadvantaged children suffer not because of any cognitive deficiency, rather because of viewing their life style, language etc., as deficit by the middle class society of which the school is the most important representative.

Since the school system is based on the middle class culture and its language use, a middle class child on entering the school at the age of 5 + finds a near identity between its home culture and language use on the one hand and the school culture and the school language on the other, thus experiencing a continuity between the home and the school. The middle class child succeeds as it confronts the materials that are congruent with its underlying skills whereas a socially disadvantaged child on entering the middle class biased school experiences a discontinuity between its home and school. It further comes unprepared to meet the demands of the school and the basic skills on which the curriculum is based. The school then becomes a place which makes puzzling demands on the disadvantaged child leading to a process of alienation, from the school and the mainstream of life. These clearly show that the continuity-discontinuity of experience between the home and the school is accountable for the success or failure at the school. This in turn depends upon the type of socialization process a child undergoes at home.

It might further be pointed out that a socially disadvantaged child who faces a discontinuity between its home and the school is put to an unequal footing when compared to its middle class counterparts who finds a continuity in experience at the school. In view of this, the provision in the Indian Constitution guarenteeing " equality of opportunity " to every citizen is

a dead letter to a vast majority of the members of the socially disadvantaged groups, as their starting point when compared to that of their middle class counterparts is unequal. Therefore, the first step in enabling a socially disadvantaged child to avail the constitutional provision of " equality of opportunities " is to offer it the equality of abilities.

At the beginning of this section, it was stated that the educational authorities lacked a realistic approach to meet the problems connected with the universalization of the primary education, which in reality concerns the issues of the education of the socially disadvantaged children. Let us have a look at the steps being taken by the government of India in this direction. The 'Challenge of Education ' (1985:4.75) feels that the setting up of the Anganwadis[9] would keep the children particularly the girls for a longer a period in the school which in its turn would solve the problem of wastage in education. This writer's observation of the functioning of the Anganwadis show that the Anganwadis do no more than keeping the children captive in their premises. Since these Anganwadis are directly supervised and run by the government officials who are primarily concerned with showing performance on file, no real learning takes place in these Anganwadis. Further, these Anganwadis do not have officials who have training to handle the special educational problems of the disadvantaged children. A matter of much more importance is the unwillingness of Delhi to recognize the cultural plurism, multilingualism and the multi ethnicity existing in India. Delhi considers the entire India as its kitchen garden and wants to enforce a uniform policy over the entire India on the basis of the research findings conducted in and around Delhi, the Capital of India and therefore, proposes a common core curriculum for the whole of India (challenge of Education, 1985: 1.9). In a country like India, one could think of a common core curriculum only in science subjects

including arithmetics. The curriculum for the language and social science text books must reflect the local culture and at the primary level even of local dialects.

The dire poverty of the members of the disadvantaged groups forces them to send their minor children to work for 10-12 hours a day in different factories/establishments for a paltry sum. This has been crushing these young kids their rights as children today and endangers their potential as adults tomorrow. The 1971 census of India lists 1,51,000 children as beggars and vagrants. It lists another 30 million child workers. In addition a few million children work in private kilns and farms and another few thousands as rag pickers in cities and towns. Almost the entire lot of these children belong to the socially disadvantaged groups. Till recently, the government of India has been trying to check the child labour. Now the employment of young children in factories has been legalized through an Act of the Parliament. There is a provision in the Act for the non-formal education of the child workers which would be quietly ignored by all concerned as after 12 hours work in a factory no child would have energy to study. When millions of children in the age group of 9-15 are legally employed in different establishments, the very idea of universalisation of primary education is given a go bye. And the Constitutional provision of offering free and compulsory education to every child upto age of 14 would also remain a dead letter in the same manner, as the constitutional provision of " equality of opportunities " has remained a dead letter to a vast majority of the members of disadvantaged groups.

Despite the enormous nature of the situation, within the limited resources available, some remedial steps could be taken to improve the condition of the children from the socially disadvantaged groups. Some of these are mentioned below.

Since the illiterate mothers can not prepare their children to meet the demands of the middle class biased schools, some alternative arrangements would have to be done to achieve for a disadvantaged child a kind of parity in the preperation for the school that home, community and the relative affluence usually give to their middle class counterparts. In another context, Sreedhar (Sreedhar,1971 & 1976) had suggested the appointment of aya teachers to play the role of ' communicative mothers ' so as to approximate the language skills of the disadvantaged children to that of their middle class counterparts. Simultaneously, the illiterate women should be offered non-formal education in the right type of socialization process so that atleast the next generation would not suffer. The Anganwadis do play a role in the child care, particularly in respect of the health of the mother and child. It could be made effective in the area of education also by divesting the government officials of the Anganwadis of the responsibility of preparing the disadvantaged children in meeting the challenges of the middle class biased school and entrusting that responsibility to the voluntary organization specializing in that area. There must also be arrangements to provide non-formal education to the school drop outs and also to the child labourers. Simultaneously, separate institutes must be set up to train the teachers meant to cater exclusively to the needs of the disadvantaged children as the present teacher training institutes in India have so far failed to handle such issues. In fact, the Ministry of Education, Government of India, itself considers the teacher training Institutes as irrelevant, for e.g. .. unfortunately the process of updating the curricula of teacher education has been very slow. Much of teacher education is irrelevant even to contemporary requirements, leave alone to those of the future' (Challenge of Education, 1985: 3.49).

In closing it might be stated that today's drop outs at the primary level would be the adult illiterates of tomorrow which in its turn would frustrate the National efforts to eradicate illiteracy from India. If the wastage in education at the primary level is prevented today through innovative educational programmed geared to meet the special needs of the socially disadvantaged children, it would be possible to eradicate illiteracy from India in just another two decades. Otherwise, it would be a vicious circle. It might further be pointed out that the entire human ability of country and its systematic development are a public asset and that failure to educate all to the maximum of their potential is a form of social waste. We must therefore, provide education to all including the socially disadvantaged children not because it is socially expedient but because it is a National necessity.

Notes:

* An earlier version of this paper was presented in a National Seminar on ' The Child Education ' Organized by the Indian Council for Child Education, New Delhi, in Delhi in September, 1985.

1. 'Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective' is a report published by Ministry of Education, Government of India, Delhi, in September, 1985, for a public discussion and for eliciting views of scholars, before a new Education Policy is framed. Chapter 2, Para 1.
2. 'Is investment on Adult Education Justified ? A Report of the Ministry of Education, Delhi.
3&4 Challenge of Education, Chapter 3, Para 16.
5. A report by Prof. A.K. Basu, Director of Admission, I.I.T., Delhi, on the Entrance to all the five I.I.Ts, in India.

6. Scheduled Castes (S.C.s) and Scheduled Tribes (S.T.s) in India today are those whose ethnic/community names appears in the gazette of the Government of India. The S.T.s were earlier known as Adivasis or Aborginal Tribes and the S.C.s as untouchables or depressed classes. The Constitution of India has made special provisions to protect the interest of these groups which include incentives for education, reservations of seats in professional colleges and in government service etc. Despite these, the two groups as a whole have not benefitted, rather a new type of elitism has cropped amongst them.

7. The Government of India appointed an Education Commission in 1964 under the Chairmanship of Prof.D.S.Kothari to look at education as a whole including primary and adult education. Its report submitted in 1966 was published under the title 'Education and National Development'.

8. Quoted in Gordon, J.C.B. Verbal Deficit: A Critique, London.

9. Anganwadis are set up through out India under the integrated child development scheme programme, in which emphasis is on health and the nutrition of the mother and child. Pre-primary education is also contemplated under this scheme so that the elder girls could attend to her studies while the younger ones are in the Anganwadis.

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